



New Year's is a time that we often think of new beginnings and New Year's resolutions. For many people one of those resolutions may be to lose weight and eat healthier. If you are one of the many that are making that resolution, have you thought about doing the same for your pet?

Obesity is a common problem that we see in our animal companions as well as people. It is estimated that about forty to fifty percent of our dog and cat populations are considered overweight or obese. As in humans, there are many different thoughts as to why this has come about. Some people blame the commercial diets fed to our pets, others point to the inactivity that both us humans and our pets fall into and yet another group will put the blame on genetics. While all of these may play a role in each individual case, the simple basics of more calories in and less calories burned equal the storage of fat. I will not attempt to address diets at all, that's just too long of a topic to cover. I also recommend that you have your pet get a complete physical exam before starting a new diet regimen to make sure that there are no underlying medical conditions that may be affected by the change in food and to rule-out disease conditions that may be the primary cause for the weight gain.

One thing that I think most owners may forget about is what other things their pets are eating besides their regular food. Do you know how many calories are in your dog's treats that you give them every time they come in from outside? How about the amount of calories in the peanut butter that went into the Kong toy? These kinds of "extras" can add on another 250 or 300 calories per day that will need to be calculated into your dog's daily caloric needs. For a twenty-five pound "average" dog that needs about 650 calories to maintain its weight, those extra calories add in a lot and exceed the recommendation that only 10% of their calories come from treats! Overweight cats and other pets run into the same problems as dogs do – we just don't realize how many calories they are actually consuming per day. Rather than feed the whole treat, break it into pieces and offer only part of the treat. It is really more the thought rather than the quantity that matters to your pet. Another option is to too choose healthier treats. Baby carrots are great for dental care and are low in calories – only about 5 calories each! Believe it or not, many dogs will eat carrots as a treat, they are very sweet and easily palatable...heck, my Greyhound loves 'em!

What do we always hear from our human trainers and weight loss specialists? Diet and EXERCISE! We can't forget that exercise boosts the metabolism, decreases the appetite and simply makes life better for our pets. For our dog companions there are many outlets for increased exercise. An extra walk, a trip to the dog park, doggy day-care, or even specialized training classes such as agility training can be extremely beneficial. For cats, encouraging exercise can be a little more tricky...Every cat is an individual and what motivates them to move around may be anything from a mouse toy, a laser pointer, or even a crumpled up wad of paper for them to bat around the room. There are specialized

toys you can buy that exist for both species, but with creativity you can even make toys for free!

Remember that both you and your pet can have the same New Year's Resolution to lead a healthier life. The benefits from exercising together make it all that much more fun for each of you!

Happy Holidays.

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